Paper Trail Boycott

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Taxonomy: retail, paper-trail subversion
Applicability: all paper trail systems

Method:

Assume that a given precinct is known to heavily support Party A and therefore Party B wishes to reduce the turnout in that precinct. Party B enlists legitimate registered voters in that precinct to appear at the polls early in the day to vote. Each of the voters complains to the poll workers that no matter how many times they try, the paper ballot never corresponds correctly to their choices. The election officials will have no choice but to remove the offending machines(s) from service. This will reduce the number of available machines, possibly to zero, and will cause long lines to be created and a large number of voters to leave without having voted, accomplishing the desired goal.

Resource requirements: Cooperative voters willing to sacrifice their votes.

Potential gain:

Small, and on a precinct by precinct basis only.

Likelihood of detection:

Unknown. With DRE systems exhibiting a failure rate of around 10% just on Election Day, a report of a malfunctioning machine is quite normal. Widespread implementation requires a conspiracy involving a significant number of people, is difficult to manage and creates a high risk that a traitor will reveal the fraud.

When the machines are examined after being removed form service, maintenance workers will be unable to reproduce the fault, but they will also not be in a position to know the sequence of touches that allegedly led to the problem.

Countermeasures:

Preventative measures:

The paper trail statutes do not deal with the question what to do when machine faults are reported. In some precincts, officials may

remove a machine from service quickly. In others, they may allow the problem to continue all day.

Making a false report of a voting machine failure should be criminalized, but detection will be nearly impossible and prosecution consequently rare.

Detection measures:

Abnormal (?) frequency of reported paper trail problems.